6: Tomasic E-4 (1947-1948) 1953 RF1 Great Russia RF1

standards of formal education, low level of agricultural technology, undeveloped means of transportation and too many idle days handicapped the advance of agriculture. In such circumstances the peasants[1] did not even produce sufficient food to nourish themselves, much less a surplus to exchange for manufactured products. As a consequence the peasants were exposed to periodical famines during which many died of starvation.

Periodical epidemics of cholera, typhus, small pox, and other diseases took a toll as high as famines. A low degree of personal hygiene in crowded living conditions also increased the death rate. In addition there was a great dearth of doctors, nurses and hospitals, and no measures of preventive medicine. Equally ruinous were the periodical cattle epidemics due to primitive techniques of cattle raising. One should add to these misfortunes the figure of more than one hundred thousand peasant homes destroyed each summer by fires, many of them the result of arson. And if one considers the widely spread robbery, theft and murder that went undetected and unpunished, one gets an idea of the distressing personal and social conditions in which the Russian peasant lived. It was in such circumstances, left entirely to his own resources, that he developed an ideological, emotional and symbolical world of his own.

17
THE ATTITUDES OF THE PEASANTRY

I

STUNNED by the magnitude of the inimical and arbitrary social and physical forces which surrounded him and completely controlled his life, the Great-Russian peasant felt impotent and helpless. In the family circle if he had to be submissive and he was exposed to arbitrariness of the elder, he also might have enjoyed a certain degree of protection and succor.

[1] [i.e. in second half of XIXth century--Analyst]

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demand for the witches (*vedma*) and wizards (*znakhar*), persons who dealt in black magic. One bought their services both as protection from his enemies and as a means of attack on them. In this manner the dealers in black magic who were a means of protection and attack were also an added threat in life. Some knowledge of defensive and offensive magic became therefore indispensable for everybody.

Destructive urges which developed in such conditions were manifested also in the idea that it was possible for one, if he so wished, to turn into vampire in order to bring evil upon his enemies or to suck their blood. Any wizard or witch by using a spell (*zagovor*) was able to transform a man into a vampire. Such men, transformed into ghost-beasts, would then deal their terrible blows on their enemies, slaking on their victims their thirst for blood.[16]

These same conditions fostered crime, particularly theft, robbery and murder. Some of the sayings, for instance, condone theft and even robbery, particularly if they were done cleverly and the perpetrators escaped being caught. That crime was not only a means of personal gain but also a means of protest against existing conditions is witnessed by those folk proverbs which rationalize or justify theft on the ground that those from whom it was stolen were likely to be much more guilty than the thieves themselves. "He who stole sinned once; those from whom it was stolen sinned ten times." The same motivation might be seen in the inclination to put the blame on the informers more than on the thieves. "Not he who steals, but he who leads is a thief," they would say.[17] Backed by such philosophy of life and favored by existing conditions, crime became widespread. And since in that society force was identified with law, violence was often justified as a means to secure the property of others, especially in times of war. "What is taken by force is sacred," the people would say.

Since the conditions in the patriarchal family and in the stratified local community fostered destructive aggression, and since violence was widely used by all the authorities, the peasant manifested a strong inclination toward violence, whenever this expression of his protest could go unpunished. On the family